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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002387

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: VOTER APATHY IN EASTERN BAGHDAD

Classified By: Baghdad 3 ePRT leader Conrad Tribble for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Anecdotal evidence from ePRT engagements as well as other organizations operating in eastern Baghdad indicate that while residents are knowledgeable about the voter registration process and the current political impasse over the elections law, their interest in or willingness to participate now in the voter registration process is decidedly low. Since voter registration started in mid-July, we have heard of very few problems in our area but have also not seen or heard of significant numbers going to the voter registration sites to check their registration status. One local district council chairman has been conducting voter registration seminars to educate NGOs and citizens on the process, with some effect. End summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) Baghdad ePRT-2 is embedded with the 4-10 Mountain Brigade, covering the three political districts of Karada, Rusafa, and 9 Nissan (sometimes mistakenly referred to as New Baghdad) on the east side of the Tigris River, south of Sadr City. The IQATF cell (Iraq Advisory Task Force) operating within the Brigade and alongside the ePRT manages a small network of local national advisors (LNAs) who provide regular "street-level" anecdotal reporting from throughout the districts. In response to an ePRT request, the IQATF LNA,s were recently asked to reply to questions about how the voter registration process was operating in their neighborhoods.

[¶3.](#) (C) The questions were posed to 19 LNA,s, broken down by religion and location as follows:

Shia) 14 Sunni) 4 Kurd) 1

Rusafa district) four persons, from three different neighborhoods

Karada district) 10 persons from five different neighborhoods, including six from the largely rural Zafaraniya sub-district and four from the more urban, cosmopolitan Karada peninsula

9 Nissan district) five persons, from five different neighborhoods

The three questions posed were:

- Where is the voting registration center?
- Are people going to check their name on the voter list?
- When are the dates to register?

[¶4.](#) (C) Responding to the first question, 10 respondents (53%) knew the specific site of their VRC or knew the specific neighborhood in which it was located. Three (16%) did not know, including one who said "no one knows as of now but rumors are that it will be" at a specific TV station which was not operational. Five LNAs (26%) replied with some version of "they haven,t decided where the VRC will be." The final respondent assumed it would be in the school in his neighborhood but had not confirmed that.

[¶5.](#) (C) Responding to the second question about whether people in their neighborhood were going to the VRCs or planning to go, the vast majority answered in the negative. 14 of the 19

(74%) said nobody was going or only a very few. They suggested a variety of reasons for this lack of interest in checking voter registration: "because they do not trust the election;" "because they believe the election results have already been determined by parties;" "the people are hesitant;" "they do not trust the government." Only two said affirmatively that people were going to VRCs in their neighborhood, and one suggested that voters would simply check their registration when they went to vote.

¶16. (C) The third question was posed to gauge how well information is getting out about the voter registration process, and here the answers were mixed. Nine (47%) knew the correct or nearly correct dates for the registration process, while eight (42%) professed ignorance. Two replied by suggesting when the election itself would be held (September or mid-October). Two of the nine who knew the correct dates said they had seen this information on billboards or in television commercials.

¶17. (C) Of the four Sunni respondents in these largely Shia-dominated districts, three knew exactly where their VRCs were located and one thought it was the nearby school. All four were in the majority who said that voters in their neighborhood were not visiting the VRCs. Three of them knew the dates of the registration period. None of them complained about lack of access to VRCs.

¶18. (C) Of note, none of the 19 respondents, offered a chance to make a general comment about the voter registration process, described any procedural problems or any instances of intimidation or violence. Several of them said they were

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aware of the political battling within the Council of Representatives over the draft election law, including specifically the question of whether lists should be open or closed.

¶19. (C) Comment: Take this for what it is, an anecdotal, non-scientific sampling of three very large districts (comprising approximately two million citizens), done at an early juncture in the registration process. But other discussions with direct EPRT and Brigade contacts reinforce the picture of a voter registration process that has proceeded without drama in this sector of eastern Baghdad) no serious procedural problems, few if any instances of violence or intimidation, but also low numbers of citizens showing up to check their registration status. Karada DAC chairman Mohammed al-Rubaie told us earlier this week he was pleasantly surprised at how uneventful the process was going, and described how he had held information sessions for local NGOs to help get the word out. We are planning to do a follow-up survey toward the end of the registration period to see if the picture changes and in particular to gauge the reaction of the local populace to the denouement of the elections law controversy, however that plays out.
CROCKER